



Colombia: For Millions, Nowhere Left to Run

Forced off their ancestral land by right-wing paramilitaries, leftist guerillas and the army, more than a million people have arrived in Colombia's cities in search of jobs and housing, but are getting little help from the government, say United Nations officials and development activists working there.

Source: IPS, Rousbeh Legatis

"It is by far the biggest humanitarian catastrophe of the Western Hemisphere, and yet the plight of those people remains a largely untold story," said Jan Egeland, under-secretary-general for humanitarian affairs, at a forum on Colombia's displaced people last week.

"We have to shed light on the forgotten emergency of Colombia. The way it is now it cannot continue," he added. "We are not doing enough. We need more to do more."

Observers say that unlike the previous government, President Álvaro Uribe Vélez seems more focused on using military means to defeat the leftist insurgency rather than opting for peaceful negotiations, a strategy that is driving thousands of people into neighbouring Panama and Ecuador, and to other parts of the country.

"In 2004, armed groups have displaced an average of 863 persons per day," he said, noting that Afro-Colombians and indigenous people were among the poorest and most affected by the conflict.

At a special session of OCHA's annual executive committee session Monday, Egeland outlined a new approach to aiding the world's internally displaced, including assigning clearer responsibility and accountability to individual U.N. humanitarian agencies that have specific experience in certain sectors, like protection, camp management and coordination, and emergency shelter.

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